

Human Care and Stewardship – Convention Report 2015

We are stewards of life and the earthly resources God has provided to us. Above all we are stewards of the Good News of Christ, the love of God, the grace and truth of the Word which compels us to share, to give and to act. The apostle John tells us:

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth. ^{1 John 3:16-18}

Our church is known for its works of mercy. We try to demonstrate this as a district and should do this in each community we have been planted. No matter what the size of our congregation or bank account God has given us life and strength and we should be at work to show compassion to those in need.

Pastor Petersen, who is the representative for our District in Stewardship matters has regularly attended the Synodical gatherings held regularly for purposes of sharing stewardship perspectives.

Human Care concerns have focused in many different areas. We are sure to fail if any list of activities intends to be exhaustive, but please use these as an encouragement to be involved the ways God guides you as a congregation.

Life: Lutherans for Life is active in the state. We hosted Dr. Lamb (Lutherans for Life Director) at a western circuit conference – you can develop simple LIFE TEAMS to help educate, celebrate and motivate people for life and against abortion. Several of our congregations assemble arrays of white crosses around life Sunday (late January)

Some congregations also participated in 40 days for Life (a 40 day long prayer vigil) in communities where abortions are provided.(I believe you could speak to pastors in Kalispell, Missoula or Billings who have participated) Others participate in the Life Chain...and hour long time of holding signs along major thoroughfares, prayer and peaceful expression for life (the first Sunday in October in the afternoon).

Those who are tuned into the legislative process have participated in Life Rally's in Helena (for personhood for instance). Some of our clergy and laity have testified before legislative committees to halt the progress of legalized physician-assisted suicide. Our committee supports the work of Bradley Williams who stays in Helena during legislative sessions to speak, lobby and forward bills to stand for life. He directs Montanans Against assisted Suicide and serves as the Publicity Chairman for Lutherans for Life in Montana.

In 2013 and 2015 we were able to help send pastors and people to the Right to Life Conference held in conjunction with the March for Life in Washington DC. The next conference for LCMS folks will most likely be in 2017; perhaps you could go! (Speak to Pastors Forke, Schopp or Thomas about this).

We were also very active in Disaster Response, especially in 2013. After the Souris river floods of Minot in the fall of 2011 work began and continued in strength in 2012 -2014 to help clean, gut (muck out) and rebuild literally hundreds of homes. Over 3,000 houses were damaged or destroyed. A total of 5 groups left out of the Flathead to Minot, ND along highway 2. Folks from elsewhere in the state made the trip as well. The first trip was in Oct. 2011. 2 trips in 2012 & 2 trips in 2013. Warren made 2 personal trips in 2013, one to work for a weekend, the other to attend & speak at the closing ceremonies of Hope Village. The 5 trips logged a total of 148 volunteers with 10,984 hours of volunteer time, which includes travel time. There were also 2 trips out of Hamilton in 2011-2012. Hope village was established on the south side of Minot with the help of Pastor Paul Krueger, Lutheran Disaster Response, Orphan Grain Train and other response organizations at one of our LCMS churches. The village provided meals and lodging for hundreds of helpers. Warren was able to attend the Syndical Disaster Response Conference in St. Louis. Ask Warren (of St. Peter Whitefish) or Pastor Sandersfeld about Disaster Response. Congregations of the District are also involved locally in working with Habitat for Humanity and an organization called "Love Inc." to provide volunteers and resources to people in need of help.

We have heard of congregations with members sent on LCMS Mercy Medical trips. If you are somehow involved in the medical profession or have interest there we encourage your congregation to support sending one of your own. In 2014 Wendy Tintzman of Grace, Hamilton took a trip to Madagascar. You might search on line for LCMS Mercy medical Teams or contact Wendy for more information.

There are many congregations that quietly do missions of mercy through their own connections outside our country. Both First, Missoula and Creston have made trips to Mexico or elsewhere. If you desire such work one place to start is Lutheran Hour Ministries International Volunteers trips. You might want to try out the Lutheran Hour Ministry's Online Mission Trips that give you a "virtual" exposure to work in far away places. You will find several video clips from each trip to Kenya, Paraguay, Thailand or Latvia. (You might check with Pastors Christiansen or Reiner if you are interested in such trips)

Our District has also done work in Prison Ministry and in the last three years sent representatives to the first Synodical conference on Prison Ministry. Pastor Mitchell conducts regular worship at MSP at least monthly and layman Dave Streufert a St. John, Deer Lodge, teaches regular Bible Studies at Montana State Prison in Deer Lodge. You might talk to Jerry Roseleip or Pastor Bob Mitchel about this work.

In May of 2014 President Harrison signed a memorandum of understanding with American Heritage Girls which is a faith-based organization that seeks to assist and support girls through spiritual development, teamwork, social skills, citizenship and leadership while growing in confidence and their Christian identity. LCMS folks in Hamilton have celebrated the first young woman to gain the stars and stripes award (comparable to Eagle Scout). We can safely encourage congregations in Montana to investigate this program that offers an excellent Christian alternative to other groups such as the Girl Scouts. You may contact DCE Amanda Adams of Grace, Hamilton for more information.

We also encouraged work for the Lutheran Malaria Initiative over the past years. The report shows that our District involved over 40% of our congregations (30% was the synod's goal) for which God is praised. Martha Mitkos reported *In 2010 a child died from malaria every 30 seconds. In just four years we (LMI as part of the global fight to help end malaria deaths) have cut the number of deaths in half. Sadly, however, one child still dies every 66.5 seconds (approximately 1,300 daily) from a disease that is completely preventable and treatable! In June 2013, the World Health Organization announced that we have made "huge, but fragile" progress in the fight to end malaria deaths. Active fundraising for LMI officially ended April 25, 2014, World Malaria Day.*

This hymn was suggested in light of that work...

"O Lord of Life, and Life of All"

Hymn of Thanksgiving for the Completion of the Lutheran Malaria Initiative
by Chad Bird

O Lord of life, and life of all,
Whose ear is near to all who call;
Health of the ill, strength of the weak,
Victor o'er death, Your face we seek:
Our sacrifice of thanks and praise,
To you, O healing Christ, we raise.

For selfless hearts, prodigal hands,
That opened wide, to distant lands;
Who shared the gifts that You first gave,
That ailing souls be spared the grave;

For active faith, for mercy shown--
All glory be to You alone!

May we, the church, Your image bear;
Your cloak of love, Lord, let us wear;
Make all we are, a mask for You,
Our labors but the work You do,
That here on earth Your will be done,
From rising dawn to setting sun.

Tune: either All Ehr ind Lob (*LSB* 500) or Ryburn (*LSB* 683)

We encourage you to consider how you may put our faith in a merciful God into actions of mercy. Let the Mysteries of God we celebrate in the sacraments and the Word proclaimed from our pulpits move us to works of service to our neighbor that they may know the Lord is God, and He is good!

Sincerely in Christ,

Pastor Vern Sandersfeld
Pastor Kevin Petersen
Warren Ellis
Jerry Roseleip (Board member representative)
Doreen Johnson (past member)
Diane Thompson (past member)